

International Conference of Social Work: Eighth Session

by DOROTHY LALLY*

The role of social work in helping families affected by the trend toward industrialization was the theme of the International Conference of Social Work in its eighth session. Highlights of the session are reported in the following pages.

THE Eighth Session of the International Conference of Social Work opened in Munich, Germany, in the Deutsches Museum, on August 5, 1956. The Conference theme, Industrialization and Social Work, drew a larger-than-usual representation of social workers, industrialists, and technical experts in community services. More than 2,800 delegates, from 56 countries, shared in the exchange of ideas and experiences related to the Conference theme.

The largest representations came from heavily industrialized countries, such as France, Germany, Great Britain, the Netherlands, Switzerland, and the United States. The interest of countries in earlier stages of economic development was evidenced in the delegations from the Belgian Congo, Burma, Pakistan, Korea, and many other areas. This combination of representatives from areas in varying stages of economic and social change produced a lively exchange of views—particularly in the small, informal discussion groups that are a vital part of the Conference sessions.

The Conference, established in 1928, is an international nongovernmental organization, set up "to provide an international forum for the discussion of social work, social welfare, and related issues, and to promote the exchange of information and experience among social workers, social agencies, and others interested in social welfare throughout the world." It is interested also in facilitating and promoting "cooperation among international organizations," and has consultative status with the

United Nations and several of its specialized agencies.

The 1956 Conference marked the first time that Germany has been host to a large international social work conference since the close of World War II. West Germany, through its national committee for the Conference, and the official and voluntary agencies of Munich and Bavaria placed a variety of resources at the disposal of the delegates. Extracurricular activities for the delegates included receptions in Munich's art museums, visits to ancient castles, and more informal entertainment. Several programs of visits to social welfare institutions were arranged; they included not only visits to the main public welfare and voluntary services in Munich but also trips to the Bavarian Alps and elsewhere to institutions for children, the aged, and persons receiving rehabilitation services.

The formal part of the Conference was conducted through plenary sessions, meetings of commissions, and study groups. The plenary sessions and the commission meetings were held at the Ausstellungspark, on the outskirts of Munich, which served as the Conference headquarters. The social welfare exhibits from the different countries were also located there and proved to be a focal point of attention; great interest was shown in the technical literature that most of the countries made available.

The United States exhibit, sponsored by the United States national committee and developed through the cooperation of the U.S. Information Service, illustrated a variety of social welfare programs, using as an example social services in Pittsburgh, a typical American industrial city.

Many former United Nations Fellows and other social workers who had studied under the sponsorship of the Exchange Service of the Department of State or under other bilateral programs attended the Conference. The renewal of earlier friendships provided a pleasant background for informal conferences and exchange of recent experiences.

A number of the social workers attending the Conference took the opportunity to participate in study tours to countries near Germany. These tours were organized chiefly to help prepare social workers for more effective participation in the Conference itself; some of them, however, were made after the Conference closed. In each country visited, the tours were designed to permit the visitors to meet social workers and public service officials in the various cities, to visit selected agencies and institutions, and to observe as much as possible of the effect of industrialization on social work practice.

Plenary Sessions

Speakers at the three plenary sessions portrayed a broad picture of social change as they analyzed the status of the family in the midst of growing urbanization, suburbanization, and other processes typical of the industrial scene. Among the speakers was Richard M. Titmuss, Professor of Social Administration of the University of London, who gave the Conference's first technical presentation. He stated that one of the major factors affecting family life is the rate of industrialization and that the family—the central social institution—cannot rapidly absorb too many new forms in cultural and community patterns without negative effects on interpersonal relationships. The impact is most serious in two or three generations, when the solid family structure may crumble under the stress of too frequent change.

Professor Titmuss analyzed the

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psychological effect of today's rationalized production, in which the worker in the large plant no longer feels a demand for his creative energy, initiative, and judgment. How can this worker be expected to react in his private life and in the community? Does the lack of recognition and stimulation on the job result in his seeking different kinds of satisfaction in the family home and in his greater participation in community affairs? The speaker emphasized that in many industries the worker has found his freedom and opportunity for independent decisions about the job more and more limited. The problem of human relations in industry, he said, cannot be solved entirely within industry itself; important factors in family life and in the community must be considered. Here social workers have an important role to play, and for this purpose they must be adaptable and learn to understand family needs in the new context.

Worldwide information on the impact of industrialization on family life was presented by Julia Henderson, Director of the Bureau of Social Affairs, United Nations, in another plenary session. The speaker approached the question from a geographic basis, pointing out the great variation in intensity of urbanization. In Africa 9 percent of the population lives in cities of more than 20,000 population, in Asia 13 percent, and in South America 26 percent. In North America and Europe, in contrast, the corresponding percentages are 42 and 35. The younger industrial countries show intensive migration to the cities, while the older industrial areas show a movement toward suburban and semirural areas.

The increased technical assistance and international studies in the social field have made available, Miss Henderson stated, a tremendous amount of sociological information concerning industrialization and the disorganization and disruption of the family. She added that the picture is not, however, all negative. In certain areas—Japan and Western Nigeria, for example—urbanization is advancing, and at the same time there is among families, to a surprising degree, a sense of belonging together and of mutual helpfulness.

The family is becoming smaller but is not being disrupted, and its functions tend to change as the process of urbanization continues. The speaker pointed out that the plight of the more vulnerable groups in society is intensified as urbanization advances. The responsibility of the state to assure Central, Provincial, or community provision for groups such as the old, the refugee, and the crippled was brought out.

Different patterns in urbanization were next reviewed by the speaker. She referred to the African pattern, in which the workers move back and forth between the city and the native home—a pattern that also occurs in Asia, although there the steady growth in urban areas is more marked. The Near and Middle East are considered "classical" areas, where the cities are old and have always been in the midst of cultural and economic currents. They, too, are now showing the impact of overpopulation, as technical development has increased the national wealth and as the peasants and nomads have begun moving to the city. Here, again, is a change from the large to the small family.

It was pointed out that even with the greatly increased knowledge of world social needs, the understanding of the interrelationship of social, economic, and cultural factors affecting family life is still fragmentary.

Other interesting reports on industrialization and the family were presented by the Rev. G. H. Levesque, of Canada; Mrs. Hansa Mehta, of India; and Professor Hans Muthesius, of Germany.

In the final paper, on the development of services, Charles Schottland, Commissioner of Social Security of the United States of America, discussed the role of social work in industrial development. He identified the contributions to social welfare made by the many different countries as they developed with outstanding success a program, such as social insurance, or industrial social work or casework. Mr. Schottland also pointed out that, whatever the form of government and at whatever stage of economic and social change, all industrial economies have certain common denominators. Among the most

marked are the greater reliance on cash income and the need for money to meet the requirements for basic existence when employment ceases. With industrial advance and the movement to cities, additional needs have developed for social services designed to prevent family disruption and juvenile delinquency, provide adequate housing, and protect children. He suggested that "perhaps one measure of how well a nation has succeeded in overcoming the problems of industrialization is the extent to which services are available to help people adjust to the problems of present-day living in an industrial society."

Mr. Schottland called attention to the responsibilities of social workers in relation to community planning and in providing opportunities for citizen leadership and joint community action. He saw the new approaches in community development programs as offering unique opportunities for social work to assist people of all countries to help themselves. The roles of the social workers in individualized family counseling in community agencies and in developing day-care and foster-care programs for children and homemakers' programs of various kinds were described, as well as their responsibilities in encouraging the retraining of workers and employee counseling. Mr. Schottland stressed the need for greater emphasis on prevention and on more adequate training of staff and on the need for social workers to develop a strong common philosophy, both international and national.

The Commissions

Much of the Conference work is organized around commissions, which are composed of specially appointed experts, usually two from every country sending delegates to the Conference. The commissions are at once small enough to permit general participation in the discussions and representative enough to allow identification of universal needs and consideration of common approaches. Following are the subject-matter questions around which the commissions grouped their discussions: (1) How less developed countries can benefit from the experience of coun-

tries highly industrialized over a long period (Chairman, Begum Anwar G. Ahmed, Pakistan); (2) the impact of industrialization on urban and rural life—how to confront the outstanding problems that arise, for example, through overcrowding in urban areas (Chairman, John McDowell, United States); (3) the protection of family life within an industrial society (Chairman, Jacques Doublet, France); and (4) the role of social work in schemes for social security (Chairman, Michel P. Goutos, Greece).

The officers of the commissions presented detailed reports to a plenary session of the Conference on the final day of the session. The findings of two of the commissions may illustrate the approach used.

Commission III, on which Jay Roney, Director of the Bureau of Public Assistance, Social Security Administration, and Sol Morton Isaac, of Columbus, Ohio, served as the United States experts, gave its major attention to family life. The commission held that high priority should be given to maintaining the best conditions for family life as areas undergo the process of industrialization. Difficulties that arise when the worker leaves his home to seek employment in a distant community were analyzed. The conflict between the generations was recognized as another area of tension and potential danger to family life.

The problem of the working mother was reviewed at length by this group. Experts from all the participating countries contributed to the discussion, viewing the question in terms of the different and sometimes opposing interests of the mother and the children, in relation to the opportunities the family can provide, the economic situation in the community, and many other considerations. The role of social welfare and labor groups in the community was outlined, as the Commission concluded its discussions by considering necessary services for strengthening family life.

Commission IV considered the role of social work in social security programs. The American experts serving in this group were Loula Dunn, Director of the American Public Welfare Association, and Dr. Hertha Kraus, of the Graduate Department of

Social Economy, Bryn Mawr College. The commission pointed out that social security benefits should not be restricted to certain classes. To prevent mass or individual distress, a comprehensive system is necessary. Its main features were seen as the sum total of provisions for individual security and maintenance of adequate family income. Involved in these provisions would be full employment measures, as well as necessary benefits, adequate health services, housing, and basic education. The commission held that all these provisions are closely interrelated, and that therefore one could not be considered more important than the other. In regard to training and administration, the commission noted the emergence of a basic knowledge and skill in these services. There is increased use of the general social worker, with the specialist being used as a consultant. The trend, the commission reported, seems to be toward "individualization" or "humanization" of the institutions administering social security. The commission stressed the need for staff to help in developing policy and in planning, to discover generic aspects of social problems, and to assist in drafting programs. It also emphasized the importance of research in social work to provide adequate factual information as a basis for sound advance.

Study Groups

To afford a majority of the Conference delegates an opportunity for direct participation in the discussion, a series of 20 study groups met to consider a variety of social problems especially associated with industrialization. Different countries had earlier been assigned responsibility for advanced planning for the groups and for providing for a chairman and rapporteur. Several of the study groups were planned with the cooperation of one of the international organizations. Thus, the International Labor Organization cooperated in the study group on industrial social welfare schemes. The International Union of Family Organizations assisted in the study group on impact of family allowances on family life. The Food and Agriculture Organization cooperated on problems of nutri-

tion in industrialized areas, and the United Nations Educational, Scientific, and Cultural Organization worked with the group on adult education in a changing industrial society.

The study groups were originally designed to be of an appropriate size for encouraging discussion, but because of the unexpectedly large registration for the Conference some groups had more than 150 participants. Other groups attracted from 35 to 50 delegates, and somewhat more active and wider participation was possible. The need for each group to wait for translation of all comments into the three working languages—English, French, and German—slowed down the proceedings considerably, however, and it was generally conceded that the real purpose of the study groups was difficult to achieve under these circumstances.

The findings of the study groups were presented in short reports made available to the Conference on the final day of the session. One of the best-attended groups, with Donald Wilson, of the United States, as chairman, discussed rehabilitation and had the assistance of Dr. Henry Kessler, Consultant on Rehabilitation for the United Nations; Gordon Slater, Assistant Secretary of the Ministry of Labor, United Kingdom; Leonard W. Mayo, director of the Association for the Aid of Crippled Children; and many other outstanding and experienced rehabilitation specialists from Europe and other parts of the world. The emphasis on the team approach and services, the identification of the goal of integrating the handicapped person into a normal setting, and the high priority given to active participation of the handicapped in all planning indicated the considerable agreement on common problems and approaches. Other questions, such as the use of the quota system in employment of handicapped persons, sparked some controversy.

Another well-attended study group gave attention to the part-time industrial employment of married women with children. Nineteen countries reported their experience, giving the views of employers—both those in opposition and those who took a positive approach by designating work

suitable for part-time employment or in arranging for mothers to work in pairs. Of special interest was the discussion of part-time work, the meaning of employment as it affects the status of the mother, the importance of preserving the family as a unit, and the role of the father when there is increased sharing of household responsibilities. The work of the social worker in counseling with families and with industry was analyzed, and a special point was made of the need for expanding research on the whole question and providing for an international exchange of information.

Other groups considered family allowances as a means of helping to provide security to the family. The experience of a number of countries with programs was presented, as well as many questions from countries where this type of benefit has not yet been established.

In all the groups, questions from the countries now in the process of industrialization served to illuminate the problems experienced by families as a result of the new character of their national economy. It was recognized that the rapid economic change taking place in some countries is producing a social impact somewhat different from that resulting from the slower process experienced by the older of the Western countries.

International Assembly of Schools of Social Work

Several associate groups of the International Conference met before or during the meetings of the Conference itself. One of the most important was the International Assembly of Schools of Social Work. The membership of the Assembly includes 236 schools of social work or social studies in 29 countries, as well as seven national associations. The 1956 meeting of the full Assembly was held during a 2-day period in advance of the International Conference of Social Work and served to draw together a wide representation of social work personnel with special competence in the fields of social work education and staff development.

Of particular interest in the Assembly's plenary sessions was a general paper presented by Dr. Philip H.

van Praag on Basic Concepts of Social Work. Dr. van Praag stressed the fact that the professions in our time are characterized by the general acceptance by members of a profession of the same body of specialized knowledge and skills, and he indicated his belief that social work as a profession is increasingly growing toward acceptance of certain concepts and certain methodology. He discussed some of these concepts that he believes are common in the free world—that man is a social individual, that all human beings are different, and that this individuality and the right of the person to live in his own way are to be respected. There is agreement, he said, that moral insight is possible and that behaving in accordance with this insight is possible. The methodology of social work is based on understanding of human behavior and on the general principles stated above. Dr. van Praag held that the following considerations are basic to the whole field of social work.

A broad base of more and more unified knowledge in the field of human behavior. The present artificial distinction between biological, social, psychological and educational sciences has to be replaced gradually by basic courses in the dynamics of human behavior in which this artificial distinction dissolves in a new integration.

General philosophical principles . . . especially relevant to the social relations of man.

A basic and more and more unified knowledge and skill in the field of methodology. Development in methodology asks for a generic, basic training for social work. More and more we shall be able to see the common dynamics in the several areas of social work practice. As a result of this insight specialization in the social work profession in the future will take place after the basic training . . . in the field and in special courses.

The growth of the profession of social work and the fact that we are beginning to think of basic concepts of social work make international cooperation, exchange of social workers and training of workers in other countries than where they will be employed possible.

Attention was given to interna-

tional social welfare in a panel session on Studies Abroad. The presentation focused on problems and potentialities in overseas study as seen by the "sending" countries, represented by Dr. Herbert Latke, of Germany, and Dr. Parin Valkaria, of India.

The "host" countries—Australia, the United Kingdom, and the United States, represented by Norma Parker, Eileen Younghusband, and Dorothy Lally, respectively — brought out trends in planning with the international visitors. The various nations' greatly increased experience in selection of applicants, as well as the cumulative experience of host agencies, has resulted in planning that is more closely geared to the individual nation's needs. Evidence of greater interest in participation in school of social work programs was emphasized. The schools are using resources, particularly in rural areas, more needed by the countries beginning their social service programs. The students are increasingly inclined to spend more of the observation period in one locality, frequently affiliating with a school of social service where there is a systematic presentation of theory as well as opportunity to observe practice.

Experiments in the group approach to training were discussed by several representatives. Australia reported its experience with a group of South Asians, for whom a special course had been developed at the University of Sydney, and the United States reported on its work with a group of Far Eastern social work students attending the University of Indiana.

Shifts in interest of visiting social workers were pointed out by the countries who act as hosts. The great interest in casework and supervision shown by the early United Nations Fellows from the European area has been broadened to include study of community organization, administration, and research as all countries of the world participate to a greater degree in the exchange programs.

The United Nations representative, Martha Branscombe, stressed the importance of relating all types of technical assistance to a country's total program, pointing out that fellowships and other exchange opportuni-

ties are only one phase of broader technical assistance. The significance of developing training opportunities within each country or within the region was again emphasized, and the need to use fully the training facilities in the sending countries before using the host country's resources was brought out.

The representative from India analyzed the psychological aspects of the learning process, describing how the visiting social worker tries to adjust simultaneously to a new culture and to new surroundings, as well as to learning new concepts and methods in social welfare. His resistance is shown in his strong identification with everything represented by his own country, but this period of resistance is usually succeeded by a period of positive learning. On return home the social worker again faces a substantial period of readjustment and may again tend to overidentify with the country of training, until he feels secure both socially and professionally in his home country. This session on international social welfare was well attended and included a wide representation of former United Nations Fellows and many other social workers who had studied here or in other host countries.

In its business sessions the International Assembly of Schools adopted a revised constitution, elected new board members, and admitted new schools of social work in Greece, Iraq, and Yugoslavia, as well as the Association of Schools of Social Work in Japan.

United Nations Expert Group

Another social work meeting of great interest was held in advance of the main session of the International Conference of Social Work. This was a group of 19 training experts, selected from all parts of the world and brought together by the United Nations to work toward agreement on the basic essentials and content for social work education.

This United Nations group, chaired by Eileen Younghusband, subsequently gave a general statement of its findings to the main Conference. Miss Younghusband reported that the work was intended to be of a preliminary nature—a forerunner to the next international survey of welfare training by the United Nations. It appeared that there were no major areas of misunderstanding on the important subject of content for social work education and that there were many important areas of agreement. The group sought to identify essentials in training content that would equip a social worker to practice his profession in any country.

Influencing the discussions and the resultant findings of the group were the growth in social welfare programs under government auspices, the importance of social change and social policy, and the need for advanced training in social welfare administration and social research. Considered, too, was the need for more effective planning for auxiliary workers, particularly in countries attempting the operation of universal public services. An auxiliary worker was considered

by the group either as one who serves as assistant to a qualified social worker or as one who, though lacking the qualifications, is doing a social work job because qualified social workers are not available. The circumstances vary, of course, from country to country. The need for supervision of auxiliary workers by well-qualified personnel was stressed. The group held that training for auxiliaries should be related to function but, in any case, should be of a professional nature rather than technical. Some of the content of such training for auxiliaries would be identical with professional training but would not have the same depth.

Planning for 1958

The next session of the International Conference of Social Work will meet in Tokyo, Japan, in 1958. Discussions will center around the theme of developing resources to meet social welfare needs. George F. Davidson, Deputy Minister of the National Department of Health and Welfare of Canada, is the new President of the International Conference of Social Work. Lester B. Granger, Executive Director of the National Urban League and chairman of the U. S. Committee of the International Conference of Social Work, is a vice president. In the period between sessions, national committees will be active, organizing local groups for preparation of reports on new trends in social welfare and developing exhibits and other informational materials for use at Tokyo.

Notes and Brief Reports

Trend of Mortality in the United States Since 1900*

Mortality is an important factor in determining the cost of the old-age and survivors insurance program. This note discusses the trend of mortality in the United States since 1900. The most striking feature has been

the great reduction for children and young adults.

Beginning in 1850 death statistics were collected by the Federal Government in conjunction with each Decennial Census, but many deaths were not reported. In 1900 a Death Registration Area was established, consisting of States that had developed acceptable registration systems. Originally the area included only about one-fourth the population, all in the Northeast. The area was grad-

ually expanded until in 1933 it covered the entire country. The figures in this note are based only on the Death Registration Area. Death registration is now virtually complete, but in 1900 there may have been a significant number of deaths that were not registered.

The simplest measure of mortality is the crude death rate. This rate is defined for any calendar year as the number of deaths in the year, divided by the estimated population in the middle of the year and multiplied by 1,000. Table 1 shows the crude death rate for each year from 1900 to 1955.

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